

The INQUIRER

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and
Religious
Liberty'*

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
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Inquiring Words

Our prophets died for the freedom of faith

Our prophets died for the freedom of faith;

We are here in their spirit.

We are here to practice and sustain our living tradition;

To light a chalice,

Claiming for justice

The heat and power of fire.

In our free faith,

We are here,

Seeking freedom from despair,

The freedom to be loved as ourselves,

And the freedom to grow beyond imagination.

We are here,

Gathered in the name of all that we find holy.

Let us give thanks for the gift of gathering here.

Amen.

— Heather K Janules

Unitz

Young Unitarians write

My Sister...

by Elizabeth Rosenberg

A sister like mine is very rare.

You don't get a more beautiful sister. As beautiful as the
night sky lit up with a glimmer of stars.

You don't get a sister more musical than mine. As
musical as an orchestra of angels playing a sweet
lullaby.

You don't get a sister as argumentative as mine! I have
lost count how many times we have fought and then
made up.

You can't get a sister as loving as mine. As loving as a
big hug to dry the tears.

I love my sister for all of these things. But I love her
most of all because she is the person who I feel is the
only person who can solve my problems, however big or
small.

My sister is my heroine.
And I love her...x

*Elizabeth Rosenberg is 12 years old and a member of
Nottage Chapel, South Wales. Contributions to 'Unitz',
the new place for creative writing by young Unitarians,
may be sent to the Editor.*

Cover: 'Génie de la Liberté', an Augustin Dumont (1801 - 1884)
sculpture, at the top of the July Column, 'place de la Bastille' in Paris.
Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

Be in the vanguard of this fight

While most Britons are not personally affected by a loss of liberties, **Alan Ruston** calls for a vigorous defense of freedom

'To Civil and Religious Liberty' was the most famous of the toasts given at formal Unitarian dinners and similar meetings from about 1800 onwards. The *Inquirer* is full of reports of them delivered by the famous in the 19th century, and many are repetitive. The most regular giver of them in the 1860s and early 1870s was Sir John Bowring, the hymn writer, who was possibly the most well-known Unitarian of his day and born 'in the faith' at Exeter. He gave several toasts each year and what he said was mostly the same. His message was that these liberties were much enhanced in comparison to when he was a young man but we must keep alert. Some claimed it was a bit thick coming from him, for in the early 1850s, as Governor of Hong Kong, he was no defender of civil liberties. For example, he opened up Siam to western trade with the threat of force. He wrote to the King of Siam – the letter is still in existence – 'I would much prefer to come to a settlement by discussion, but I have well-armed ships and plenty of troops available to go into action if not.' But then how many of us can see with any clarity the things we have done or said in the past that have limited someone else's liberties?

However, since the time of the First World War, which had so many effects on Unitarianism, the toast has gone out of favour and has increasingly disappeared from Unitarian occasions. A great pity. It's a while since I last heard it given – the annual Asparagus Lunch at Evesham is one of the few occasions where it's a regular feature. The toast has many resonances that are at the centre – or should be at the centre – of our concerns. We need to work strongly for its better achievement, as we cannot say with Sir John Bowring that it's in a better condition than when any of us were young – whatever age we are. The regular attacks on and infringements of civil and religious liberties – some of which could not be comprehended by our forebears – make complacency impossible in any country of the world.

I think it's necessary to look at civil and religious liberty in two of its aspects, though each spills over into the other. The first is personal and individual: how are our own, or indeed anyone's, liberties affected by what is happening around us? What must be done to defend or expand these necessary liberties? And the second, of course, is collective instances of society as a whole, or specific communities, having liberties diminished or taken away by the activities of the state.

Can you think of an occasion or times when your personal liberties have been under threat or even taken away? Anyone who has served in the armed forces or been in severe war-time conditions will have experienced it. But apart from that? I hold that the opportunity this toast gives for us personally is *not* to say to ourselves, 'Well I'm all right, let's not worry'. This is a great temptation in our mainly comfortable society, but this is just to brush the problem away. If we think about infringements to our own liberties we may develop an enhanced empathy with those people who have fewer liberties.



The prison at Guantanamo Bay represents the decline of civil rights. USMC photo

What about me? Well I've rarely experienced loss of liberty or freedom. I've always been in charge so to speak, so my lack of experience may not be a surprise. What I am conscious of – and it affects most at one time or another – is that when you're ill and go into hospital, you perforce give up many of your personal liberties. Maybe this is essential for the healing process to be successful, but it remains an area which needs constant awareness and scrutiny. Perhaps we recall the controversy a few years ago about a Liverpool hospital's wrongful use of organs from deceased patients without permission. The action of the state in respect to our bodies is a whole area involving our individual liberties. It needs constant vigilance.

What about the second aspect? – infringement of our corporate liberties as a group or society. Recent years have seen many changes, few for the better. Liberties seem to be under challenge everywhere. We only have to fly in an aeroplane to grasp what has happened, albeit with the best of intentions. Then there are those, for example, incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay by the USA, a country noted for proclaiming liberties, but whose leaders have decided to take the route of removing a few from the rule of the ordinary law. I recall when retribution is advocated and the normal rules of civil procedure torn up, the quote by Gandhi, who said, 'If you insist on an eye for eye we will all eventually become blind.'

Perhaps what I have written seems to contain little optimism for the future. However, there has been at least one plus for us in England and Wales this year. Blasphemy, which posed the constant threat of being a significant limitation of our religious liberty, has finally been abolished. Since 9/11, we have seen many liberties increasingly under threat, both in Britain and in the rest of the world; we are in a state of flux brought about by fear. What advice can be given to Unitarians in all of this? I started with Sir John Bowring and his gunboats, and I will finish with him. What was probably his last toast, given on 22 May 1872 – not long before his death – to a large gathering of Unitarians held at the Crystal Palace in London and arranged by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. What he said is as true for us today as it was then:

'We are bound to be in the vanguard in the great struggles for civil and religious liberty ... It is the duty of Unitarians to be at the head of the army, that they should lead the forlorn hope, through the breeches of the citadel, and there erect the flag on which we will subscribe, "Liberty for all men – equality for all, the right and the duty of private judgment."'

Alan Ruston is a member of the Watford Unitarian Fellowship.

Campaigning for women's rights

By Kate Taylor

Campaigns for women's human rights provided the focus for a double event at Golders Green Chapel on 26 July. General Assembly president Joyce Ashworth led a service in which she observed that 'Discrimination against women drastically limits their life chances, and creates a natural barrier to development in the world's low-income countries'. Joyce pointed out that two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women and that, of the estimated 1.5 billion poor people in the world, 60-70% are women. She quoted the 2005 report of Tony Blair's Commission for Africa, which asserted that 'Women's emancipation is their right – it is also a pre-requisite to development and growth' and suggested that the three most pressing issues facing the world today – world poverty, international development, and women's human rights – are closely linked.

Joyce drew a range of case studies from *Women's Rights* by Geraldine Terry (Pluto Press in association with Oxfam), which was published in 2007 in the 'Small Guides to Big Issues' series.

Following the service, Heather Harvey, the manager for Amnesty International UK's Stop Violence against Women campaign, set out some of the abuses women face, not only elsewhere in the world but in the United Kingdom, too. These include both domestic violence (sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape and female genital mutilation), and violence in the wider community (rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work or in educational institutions, sex trafficking, and forced prostitution).

Amnesty's Stop Violence against Women campaign is tackling these problems on five fronts, Heather explained. It is urging the UK Government to sign and ratify, to the highest standards, the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings. It is also urging the Government to implement an integrated strategy to tackle violence against women as recommended by the United Nations. More broadly, it is challenging attitudes that tolerate and normalise violence against women and, in particular, using a range of media, it is trying to engage men in preventing violence.

A fourth area of concern is the particular problem created



GA president Joyce Ashworth handing a cheque to Heather Harvey, Manager of Amnesty International UK's Stop Violence against Women campaign. And, on the right, Golders Green treasurer Andrew Tucker. Photo by Kate Taylor

by the Government's 'No recourse to public funds' rule which denies non-native women, whether in this country legally or not, any financial assistance from the state even where they are the victims of trafficking or they have been exploited as cheap labour.

Amnesty is seeking an amendment to the rule to ensure that all women in the United Kingdom have equal access to safety, protection and justice. The fifth front is an international one: Amnesty is supporting Iranian women's 'campaign for equality', it is facilitating African women's struggle to put gender at the heart of peace and reconstruction after conflict, and it is campaigning for safer schools for girls and women and promoting recognition that violence against women and girls is an obstacle to their educational, and hence life, chances.

At the end of the afternoon, Joyce Ashworth presented Heather with a cheque for £1,000 which had been raised by the Unitarian and Free Christian Peace Fellowship's annual appeal. A further £590 came from the Golders Green congregation, raised as a memorial to its president, Pat Tyler, who died recently whilst in office. The cheques were presented by Golders Green treasurer Andrew Tucker. The following day, donations at the Sunday service realised another £25.

Kate Taylor is a member of the Westgate congregation.

Cross Street outing

Cross Street Chapel managed to hold its annual congregational outing this year after last year's was cancelled due to the terrible weather. Four car loads set off for the Lake District and the weather slowly improved, with blue skies on the way home.

After rendezvous at the Newby Bride hotel, we drove to Hill Top, the home of Beatrix Potter; now a National Trust property. We were drawn to visit because the Potters were, of course, a well-known Unitarian family; and Beatrix's grandfather, Edmund was baptised at Cross Street Chapel and worshipped there for many years. The Rev William Gaskell holidayed in the Lake District with the family; and the Gaskell Room at Cross Street has a photograph of him with young Beatrix.

We then visited the historic Unitarian Chapel in Kendal for afternoon tea. The Rev Celia Cartright proudly explained the history of the building and the Unitarian presence right in the town centre of Kendal. It was great to have the opportunity to visit one of our far-flung chapels and we thank Celia for welcoming us. The photograph, with Celia and the Rev Jane Barraclough, was taken in the garden of Kendal Chapel.

— Derek McAuley



A 'perverse and mischievous tradition'

By Margaret Kirk

Some years ago, a past member of Dover Unitarian Church where I attended in my teens, reminded me that I had posed the question: could women become ministers?

He recalled that even at that age I had some interest in the role. I'd forgotten this.

Observing the recent Church of England Synod debates in York around the issues of women bishops and gay clergy and the brouhaha surrounding those debates, I feel a sense of relief mingled with gratitude. Could women become ministers? I might have asked that question many years ago but, for longer than I can remember, I have taken it for granted that a woman has every right to stand alongside her male colleagues in a ministerial capacity. And how anachronistic to believe otherwise!

There is so much that appears incredulous and absurd about the disputes that wrack the Church of England at the moment. "Wake up! Wake up!" we might have shouted from the roof top of our York Unitarian chapel to the assembled delegates meeting at York University. "This is the 21st century; this is England; women are equal partners ... where have you been all this time?"

In response to all the rumblings about traditionalist clergy splits, Vatican dismay that women bishops will jeopardise ecumenical dialogue, suggestions about creating a tier of super-bishops to appease the critics, one letter in the Guardian put it rather well I thought: 'the time has long past to stop wrapping their misogyny up as theology as if women are the faulty part of God's creation' (Sally Barnes 7th July '08)

How would I feel if I was having to fight that battle in the 21st century; having to counter the argument that, because the ministry of women bishops deviates from scripture, it is has no legitimacy? In one sense, this is not a challenge that any Unitarian man or woman needs to be concerned about. My religious sensibility tells me the apostolic succession is an interesting historical and political construct that hasn't got much relevance for contemporary society. Dressing up is for theatre, and hierarchies are for flattening – the argument isn't worth engaging with. But, in another sense, it is.

Misogyny has stained the Christian tradition throughout its history so as a woman I delight in seeing other women in positions of power. I'm pleased to hear that other momentous acts of defiance have been going on throughout July – that in Boston USA three women were ordained Roman Catholic priests despite the threat of excommunication. I'm delighted that Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori is Primate of the Episcopal church – a biologist, an oceanographer, a pilot. I'm delighted to read Miranda Threlfall-Holmes, chaplain at University College Durham, is part of a group fighting for equality and that Lucy Winkett, Canon Precentor of St. Paul's, writes of her concern and sense of shame that the Established Church is still debating on what basis it can admit women to its leadership when the Sex Discrimination Act was passed in 1975. These women are thoughtful, articulate and deserving of high office and I believe that sense will prevail in the Anglican Communion – eventually.

But I'm even more delighted that I come from a tradition where the first woman minister in England, Gertrude von Petzold, was a Unitarian one, inducted into ministry at Nor-



Gertrude von Petzold

borough Rd, Unitarian Church Leicester in 1904. It took the Church of England another 90 years to ordain women priests.

I wonder what it must have felt like when she trained for ministry over 100 years ago, the only woman amongst male students. We know that one man, Fred Hankinson, described how male students refused to sit next to her at the refectory table. He says "I championed her and talked them round so that she was able to eat with the rest of them"

Unitarian women of my generation take it for granted that there is nothing whatsoever about being female that should act as an obstacle, disallowing us from the office of ministry whilst Catholic and Anglican women fight hard for equal status. Some of these women must feel like Gertrude von Petzold – more like pioneers breaking the male stranglehold on the church with that heady mixture of determination, excitement and anxiety that all pioneers feel.

Unlike them, Gertrude had few models to look to when she chose her vocation. Perhaps she knew that Glasgow Universalists had ordained Caroline Soule in 1880 and gained courage and conviction from that. She must have been a truly exceptional person to venture forward at that time and in that climate, conditioned into believing that ministry was an inappropriate calling for the female sex. At her induction at Leicester in 1904, Joseph Wood said "We recognise the courage of her who tonight breaks a perverse and mischievous tradition."

In 2008, how much more 'perverse and mischievous' does it seem to hold women back from full partnership in ministry?

There is much that I find indefensible about a tradition of male succession that has excluded women and I would want no part of it, but my heart goes out to those women fighting for what is just. I admire them and I wish them well.

The Rev Margaret Kirk is minister with York and Whitby Unitarian congregations.

Unitarians promote faith at Eisteddfod

By Eric Jones

The National Eisteddfod of Wales is one of the largest cultural Festivals held in the United Kingdom. This year, the event was held at Cardiff during the first week of August. Almost 160,000 visitors attended on the eight days of the festival, which included competitions in choral and solo singing, dancing, recitation, drama, arts and crafts, brass bands, architecture and literature of all kinds.

The whole event is conducted entirely in the Welsh Language and this year's event was unique for the number of young people taking part, and with the young people taking many of the major prizes during the week. During the evenings, concerts and plays were performed and there were numerous events for young people, including performances by youth bands. Every seat was taken in the 500-seat pavilion for the Singing Festival, held on the first Sunday.

The Eisteddfod field has a large pink pavilion for the competitive events and concerts, with smaller pavilions for literature, drama, arts and crafts, dancing and a discussion forum. Surrounding all these are around 750 smaller stalls sponsored by various organisations, including banks, craft shops, local government organisations, sports clubs, bookshops, different charities, churches and many, many more.

Unitarians have had a presence on the field since 1958 when the Eisteddfod was held at Ebbw Vale but in recent years, we have only maintained a presence every other year when the Eisteddfod is held in South Wales. The Eisteddfod returns to Ebbw Vale in 2010.

This year's Unitarian stall concentrated on Unitarian activities rather than buildings. Exhibits included examples of various forms of worship – traditional, open air services and a service in a circle. We also showed pictures of children and youth activities, as well as pictures to remind people of the Gellionnen vandalism.

We had a minister present on each of the eight days of the event, and more than 40 volunteers from our different congregations helped with providing a good welcome, cups of tea and Welsh Cakes. We were busy all week except when it rained pretty heavily on one or two days. There were books for sale and pamphlets for distribution and plenty of opportunities for people to read all about us in both Welsh and English with further information available either locally or from Essex Hall.

Many of our visitors were members of one or other of the 21 Unitarian Congregations in Wales and the Unitarian area provided them with a rest area and some refreshments. Other people called for sentimental reasons. Their parents or grandparents had been active in Unitarian circles or they themselves had attended a Unitarian Sunday School and had moved away and lost contact over the years.

Some people called in order to get to know us a little better and some regretted that they lived too far away from a Unitarian congregation to participate. Every time, we come up against the fact that there is no Unitarian congregation or group in North Wales. A young lady who attended Altrincham congregation had moved to Llandudno and regretted not being able to belong to a Unitarian group there. Maybe we should take a leaf out of the Quaker Movement. They have recently set about forming groups of eight or 10 people in various areas of Wales so that no-one has too far to travel for their



The Unitarian stand at the Eisteddfod attracted visitors.

meetings. One enthusiastic member of an evangelical group was very concerned about us and offered to pray for us. We thanked him for his concern and offered him a cup of tea and friendship.

Unitarians and evangelicals had a stall of their own whilst eight different churches came under the umbrella of Churches Together in Wales in one large pavilion. Some of our numbers regretted the fact that we were not included with them but the impression I gleaned was that the individual denominations lost their identities in the midst of a very large gathering of church members. That is, of course, the purpose of meeting together under one roof.

All in all, it was not just a successful week for the festival itself but a success for Unitarians also, with many commenting on our display, the information provided and the welcome given. There was a sense of dedication among our volunteers, who gave freely of their time and car fuel in order to help during the week.

The Rev Eric Jones is a Unitarian minister.

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Knock, Knock! Who's there? A Uniwhat?

By Andie Camper

'Door-to-door work is a lost art,' said another Unitarian when I mentioned I had been doing some, 'I think it is great. You must write something for *The Inquirer*'. My Church secretary said 'Gosh you're brave'.

'What do you say?' said another.

Westgate Chapel in Lewes is in desperate need of some new local members and, for me, doing door-to-door work is a part of my very distant evangelical background. Adapting it to fit in with my now-Unitarian perspective is a work in progress. I set myself the task of visiting 70 houses and trying to get to meet the people and talk to them about us. Most know so little about Westgate. So I decided an introduction was needed and also something to start talking about. My first task was to run off a simple survey-type sheet with questions that asked about faith. 'Do you have one?' Is it identified as Pagan or Christian and so on, listing off the top of my head broad categories of beliefs. Then, did you attend a Sunday school? was another question. I did not want to give people anything difficult or controversial to answer. On the sheet, I stated someone would return in a few days to collect the results and also gave the postal address for those who wished to take part but whom I failed to see. I decided on my target area and dropped the leaflets through the doors before I called.

Wearing a t-shirt with our chapel logo, I then went door-to-door knocking a few days later and saying; 'Hello I left a survey sheet about faith and belief the other day, I wondered if you had had time to fill it in for us?' Putting the emphasis on people doing something for us rather than telling them what they must do seemed the best plan. Softly, softly, no hard sell tactics, I did not want to be associated with Jehovah's Witnesses! My mission was to just be nice to people and to greet them with a cheerful smile.

Not as easy as it sounds, but I was prepared for what the majority would say. 'I don't want to know.' I was, however, rather taken aback that the majority of those saying this, so far, have been those who are retired. Demographically I expected this more from younger people.

Although statistically I knew most people would react in a negative way, like the woman who opened the door and said 'I don't want to know, I'm a Baptist' loudly; before slamming the door in my face. Funny, I do not remember Jesus doing that!

It is, however, the positive responses that that make such work worthwhile. Like one elderly woman who had diligently filled in the questionnaire, saying she used to come to our church, but frailty left her unable to go far today. She may have stopped coming 20 years ago, but I will make sure that she gets our newsletter in future and, to show her we still care. I will keep in touch now that I know she is there.

Then another younger fairly recent divorcee who when asked if there was anything a congregation could offer her; answered. 'I really long to play a church organ. I have an electric one on which I am taking lessons, but I need to practice on a tracker action one.' Now, it so happens, Westgate has an organ and no one to play it for most services. So this was another good result. I promised to let her practice, no skin off our noses as organs need to be used and, who knows, I may have found a new organist once her confidence increases.

Interesting conversations followed with other people I con-



Photo by Pat Herman

tacted: Atheists who detest the zeal of one rather well known figure's recent attack on faith. They were actually even more interested when I pointed out that Atheists were welcome to join as, in our book, religion is about community and personal reflection, not 'you must believe this or that'.

I found my self sat down in a lounge discussing Green Belt (a Christian arts festival) and church architecture with another youngish chap who has recently moved to Lewes.

Another woman and I discussed special-needs animals, after playing catch the cat when the door was opened. I told her about our special-needs rescue dog, and she shared about her special-needs rescue cat. We had a most enjoyable conversation.

I met a Quaker on another doorstep, and we discussed the similarities of our denominations. I also promised to let him know when we were running our next music event. Despite some 20 posters in shop windows, he did not know.

Some people were less engaging, but did take the time to go over the survey with me and one man complimented me as I left. 'You have a nice approach. Thanks for calling'.

If you are going to tackle door-to-door work, that needs to be the reaction you leave behind. That last man's comment has done wonders to dispel the anxiety of, 'Am I doing the right thing?' Brandishing leaflets about us will just overflow recycling bins and posters outside are often unseen. If our congregations are going to grow, it will be by meeting people and door-to-door work is one way of doing it. A personal invitation to an outdoor service in our local park and a link to our chapel website is all I left behind. Both of these will try to explain what a Unitarian is. I hope I also left behind my friendly smile. I do not expect overnight success and overflowing pews, as I may have done as an evangelical a long time ago. Building congregations almost from scratch, as in this case, takes time and effort. Getting the door open is just the first step.

Finding a reason to return is, I hope, the key to building bridges with people who are probably Unitarians but just do not realise it yet. Keeping the bridge open is also vital.

I will end by saying, if you want to learn more, I would be happy to run a day school for those Unitarians who want the confidence to knock on doors.

The Rev Andie Camper is associate minister at Westgate Chapel Lewes.

GA president at Ottawa conference

By Joyce Ashworth

Delighted to convey greetings from 'across the pond', I received a wonderful welcome at the Canadian Unitarian Conference Annual Conference Meetings held in Ottawa in May. I instantly experienced a sense of belonging, with these happy, humorous and passionate Unitarians, which will stay with me, and I came away having made many new friends and feeling incredibly privileged to have shared this memorable experience.

There are just 45 Unitarian churches, widely spread across Canada and, despite travelling distances involved, these meetings attracted an attendance in excess of 600 with a noticeably good age spread and including just short of 200 below 18 years of age. Noteworthy perhaps, is that 10-15 years ago, average attendance at the meetings was in the region of 120 and that strategic decisions were made to improve things. Accepting that it would be a slow process, but tackling it with energy and determination clearly achieved results and we would do well to study and learn from their experience, adapting approaches to suit our culture and church groupings.

I hope, during the year, to pass on as much as possible about what I observed and assimilated, though my presidential timetable is already tightly scheduled. Almost immediately following my return, I spoke at Unitarian College's End of Session Proceedings, about nurturing and valuing our precious resource of volunteers.

Whilst in London recently, I met with John Harley to discuss the possibility, in conjunction with Education & Training Commission, of training sessions based on the Canadian "Spirit Play" programme to take place for junior church leaders at venues in this country. I found the demonstration session I attended in Ottawa fascinating and absorbing. Watch out for announcements about these and make sure someone from your church enrolls.

There were many things about the organisation of the Canadian Meetings, which I have passed on to the Executive Committee and I hope certain of them may be adopted in some

form. One of the notable things, which would represent a big shift for us, was that in all sessions apart from Opening/Closing ceremonies, keynote speech and main worship event, about ten optional activities were available. It meant more pre-planning and organising – all participants were asked to register for each slot in advance, so that judgments could be made about viability and appropriate facility provision, but I was happily engaged during every slot without attending a single business meeting, and many attendees clearly treated this occasion as a holiday break and a chance to catch up with Unitarian friends from miles away, who they only met on an annual basis.

I will make mention of just three other important factors:

1. Much kudos was given to those who are involved with denominational administration. Serving on the Board – their equivalent of our Executive Committee – was seen both as a great personal honour and an honour for those congregations which have members, including their Ministers, serving. It was apparent that, through this wide involvement, congregants were extremely well-informed.

2. The Keynote speech, and extensive questions and participation which followed, demonstrated that commitment to social justice and action is a major feature of Canadian Unitarianism. They believe they can and do make a difference.

3. I personally witnessed the fact that Canadian Unitarians take every opportunity offered to them to enthuse about their faith in a confident but natural way and encourage others to explore its possibilities. They exude the impression that to be a Unitarian is something to celebrate and be proud of.

Interestingly, the question I was most asked was: "Why didn't we know Unitarianism existed when we lived in the UK!"

I have already forgotten the exact details of many of the interesting conversation I had, but I will forever remember the immediacy, the joy, the earnest desire of people to communicate with each other and the natural interaction of like-souls.

Joyce Ashworth is president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

UCA holds synod, makes plans for London

By Jim Corrigan

The Unitarian Christian Association (UCA) is to venture into the London District for the first time when it holds its eighth synod at Rosslyn Hill chapel, Hampstead, on Saturday, 25 October, at 2pm – a district where the liberal Christian presence has traditionally been weak.

The Rev Alex Bradley, the new UCA moderator, made the announcement at the association's seventh synod at Unitarian New Meeting Church in Birmingham in early August. Alex made clear that all those interested in liberal Christianity are welcome at the synods – not just UCA members. He stressed that the UCA aims to be a resource for the wider denomination, 'an integral part of the General Assembly'.

Plans for a series of events in the coming year were outlined: the UCA's Lance Garrard Memorial Lecture on Theophilus Lindsey on Sunday, 16 November at 2pm at Essex Church, Kensington (to be given by the Lindsey scholar Professor Grayson Ditchfield); two retreats in 2009, a synod to be held in Wales for the first time, and a possible trip to the Taizé com-

munity in France.

The synod heard that the association was continuing to offer book grants to all ministry students, that it plans two further publications (following its prayer book 'Daybreak and Eventide'), that it will be making a donation to the Welsh chapel (Gellionnen) vandalised earlier this year. It has also set up links with the Centre for Radical Christianity in Sheffield.

The UCA President, the Rev Brian Cockcroft, reported that ties with the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland have been strengthened over the past year, following the two bodies establishing formal links 15 months ago.

Brian is a founder member of the UCA and he was proud that his 93-year-old mother, Wendy, also a long-standing UCA member, was present at the synod. Wendy Cockcroft has been a member at Birmingham New Meeting for the past six years. Its minister, Rev Simon Ramsay, hosted the synod.

Jim Corrigan is a member of the Golders Green congregation.

'Old Students' enjoyed varied programme

By Angus Parker

Proceedings of the 91st Annual Meetings of the Ministerial Old Students' Association opened on Monday, 23 June at Harris Manchester College, Oxford with the Rev Bill Darlison of our Dublin church giving an informal, very detailed talk, "Spreading the Burden", during which he replied to questions as they arose.

What ministry Bill once did to smaller effect, he does in Dublin to great effect. Over a dozen years, a congregation of 200 has grown with members' average age of 45 and having several "intellectual" and "celebrity" members. There are 100 weddings a year, a Justice and Peace Group, Sunday school, choir and weekly Meditation for some 17 persons.

Can the U.K. learn from this success? Well, the British temperament is not the Irish temperament; the Irish are a poetic people. Dubliners are very good at adapting. Bill suggested reasons for Dublin Unitarian success:

- Ireland's dissatisfaction with Catholicism retains a need to gather for worship.
- Since 1997 divorce has been legal in Ireland, the Unitarian church remarries.
- Dublin's Unitarian church building is attractive, local and suits the Irish need for liturgy.
- The organist knows Dublin's varied musicians, who often feature at weddings, at which guests are introduced to Unitarian liberalism and good impressions are noised abroad in the city.

How does this busy church meet its own, and the needs of others with just one person ministering? Also, how does it do it when the minister is sick for a year? In fact that minister, Bill, returned from treatment to find the church thriving! The church

North Cheshire arts exhibition

After the morning preparations, the 78th Arts & Crafts Exhibition was opened by Mrs Margaret Hallsworth, from our Stalybridge church, the Rev Andrew Parker presiding.

There were live performances in the church, musical first, followed by the spoken word. All other exhibits were displayed in the schoolroom for everyone to peruse at their leisure. The total number of entries was up again on last year, being 360 in total. This is very pleasing to report, as interest seems higher. Flowery Field won the premier award of the Shield with 156 points gained, the runners-up being Dukinfield with 139 points. Denton took the Primary Award with 52 points, Flowery Field being runners-up in this section with 42 points. Denton also won the Challenge Trophy, awarded to the school with the highest average mark, with an excellent 80.11% overall.

Joanna Leigh from Dukinfield won the Jubilee Award for the 10-12 age group, Chloe Oates from Flowery Field winning the Teenage Award for the 12-18 age group. Sue Howard from Flowery Field won the Alice M. Kelsall award for solo-singing, Emma Whitehead from Denton won the Jack Hinds award for the novice section of the solo instrumentalists and the duet from Dukinfield took the Centenary award.

Congratulations to all the winners, but also many thanks to everyone who entered something in the exhibition. Grateful thanks to the willing band of workers who helped, and to our adjudicators, who give so willingly of their time.

— Margaret Barber



The Rev Arthur Steward (l) conducted the valedictory service for Ray Seal, lay preacher at Framlingham and Bedfield.

devised preaching, and other requisite courses for itself, and it sent people on a pastoral theology course. It trained and appointed two wedding chaplains, one of whom earns a living by the chaplaincy. The church employs part-time ministers.

When others share the burden, the full-time minister is free to concentrate on exploration of symbolic (sacramental) worship which appeals both to intellect and emotion, and he is free to explore preaching, "soul", and preaching the soul, as Emerson advised if one wishes for thriving souls.

Tuesday began with prayers led by the President, the Rev Angus Parker. He introduced into the worship the largest quercus leaf that he had ever seen and which he had acquired from The Parks before breakfast.

The AGM became too lively for the president – who had opened the meeting exhorting the august members to "settle down now" – so that he felt impelled to hammer loudly with the newly donated gavel, (surnamed "Lloyd", nicknamed "vox Dei"). As the speaker for the evening was unable to appear, we agreed (eventually, for those who emerged from the maze of opinion and jockeying still knowing who was what when and where) on three voices from among us to speak for ten minutes each. The Rev Dr Ann Peart described the latest university validation of modules such as "Reflecting on Pastoral Practice". The Rev Jane Barraclough gave as full an account of ministry in the ever-changing East End as is possible in 10 minutes, and the Rev Duncan McGuffie (an Anglican priest) gave a horse's mouth impression of topical concerns, such as women bishops.

After the reception, lunch, AGM of governors, lecture and tea, the Rev Arthur Stewart conducted the service, a valedictory for Ray Seal, lay preacher at Framlingham and Bedfield in Suffolk. Ray read a passage from *The Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel, a novel about the nature of truth and about a boy who is a Unitarian, but might not quite know it.

On the last day, the Rev Barraclough conducted the Annual Service before Dr Peart enabled a wide and deep analysis of contextual changes affecting "Enabling Spiritual Leadership in all Unitarian Communities." Interestingly, consideration of skills and collaborative method brought us back to where Bill Darlison had left us.

The Rev Angus Parker is minister for Hyde.

Letters to the Editor

Don't let Moretonhampstead Unitarian Chapel go

To the Editor:

In your issue of 26 July, you printed a piece 'Celebration at Moretonhampstead', about the service there on 29 June 'to mark the completion of a three-year renovation of the building'. I was there, as the caption to the accompanying photo mentions.

The piece continues: 'The building is now let as an art studio, with the proviso that occasional Unitarian worship may be held'.

With respect, I do not think that this is good enough. The first duty of those in charge is that the chapel should be used, as much as possible, for religious worship, and I should like to mention three things, over recent years, which suggest that that obligation is not being taken seriously enough.

Since 2001, an open (and continuing) offer has been 'on the table' from me to conduct one Service a month at Moretonhampstead, and to spend one day a month on congregation building in Moretonhampstead's hinterland, at my own expense. That offer has not been taken up.

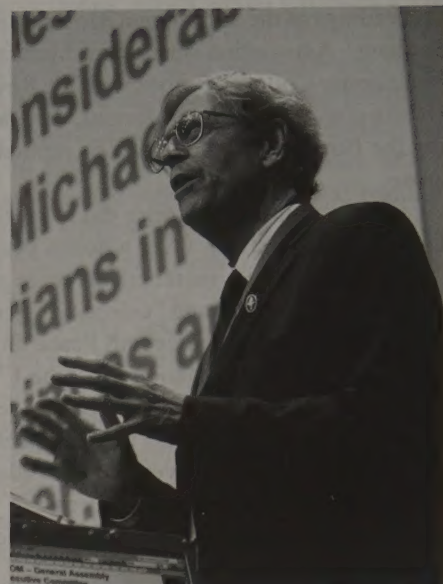
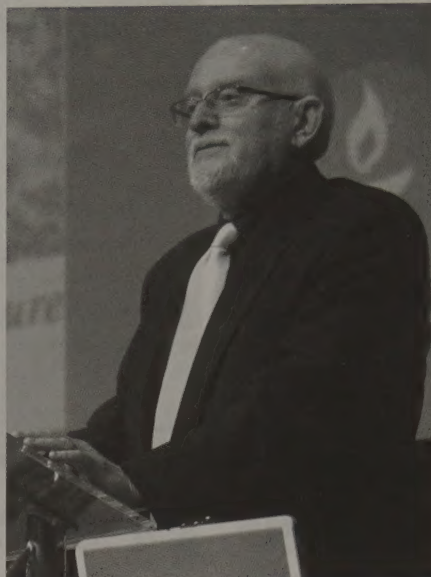
In 2002, I sent a Moretonhampstead congregational subscription/donation to the Acting Minister, for use in any way thought desirable. This was returned to me as being unnecessary.

In 2006, since there was no effective notice-board at the gate of the Chapel (there still is not), I volunteered to pay the costs myself of having one made, with local contact details thereon, and then erected. Again, this offer was not acted upon.

None of this is in any way good enough. If the will and the effort were there, something small and continuing might be possible in this isolated and beautiful corner of Devon. If not, then Unitarians – and particularly those in charge – have only themselves to blame for the ongoing decline and marginalisation of our movement.

Dr. Martin Pulbrook

Lay Preacher at South Shore
Unitarian Church, Blackpool
Mullingar, Ireland



Roy Smith (l-r) and Mike Tomlin were both awarded honorary membership in the General Assembly at the 2008 meetings. Photos by John Hewerdine

Honorary GA members deserve certificates

To The Editor:

Unitarian members may not be aware that there is no evidence of honorary membership of the General Assembly handed out at the GA meetings. As you might remember, my granddad was given his life-time achievement award this year but when I asked him to show me his certificate, he said that he didn't have one! May I suggest that a certificate or scroll be presented to ALL living honorary members as soon as possible or at the next meetings?

Christopher Tomlin (age 11) Member at Padiham Unitarian Church

Action-focused leaders are needed

To the Editor:

Good to see the GA News section in the 9 August *Inquirer*. I am extremely pleased to see that our active ministers and lay pastors can now access independent support. Now we need some way of feeding back to the General Assembly Executive Committee about what causes some of these problems so that difficulties can be addressed. Our aim should be to ensure excellent working conditions for all. Of the other news, I would like to comment on three items.

First, we are told that the EC has an Action Plan which is a work in progress but we will not be shown it until next April – why the wait? Second, we are told that the Growth Day at the Annual Meetings was 'inspiring'. Our Chief Executive may think this, but he is in the minority. The evaluation of the 2008 Annual Meeting tells us that 24 of the 101 respondents thought that any part of the day was inspiring

and only 10 (one of whom an EC member) thought that the day i.e. both the morning and afternoon sessions, was inspiring. People are talking to the GA – someone somewhere needs to be listening. And last, the EC has had a wander round the Houses of Parliament. Our young people were offered this back in March. It was to have happened in May, and they are still waiting.

It is very hard not to feel frustrated and disappointed by some of this. The EC is clearly working long hours and believes that it is doing what needs to be done. But we have the EC elections coming up. We need to thank our first EC for what they have achieved and now actively seek out some action-focused leaders who want to transform British Unitarianism. I have spoken with some people about standing and overwhelmingly the feeling has been that the pattern established by this EC of two-day meetings is a real barrier. Let us acknowledge that such long meetings are not required, that video

(Continued on next page)

Julie Dadson will be missed



Julie Dadson
Photo by James Barry

By Marion Baker

After four successful years as the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre's manager at Great Hucklow, Julie Dadson has decided to move on and will be relinquishing her position when a replacement is found. Management Committee members are sad that she is leaving and pay tribute to her commitment and many achievements.

Julie has built on the work started by her equally hard working predecessor, Liz Shaw, making the centre a welcoming Unitarian spiritual home, being a good neighbour to the village community and stewarding the centre's land and property.

Key challenges, such as overseeing the impact of major building work, discovering and dealing with high levels of radon gas, implementing complex legislative changes, making radical changes to satisfy rising guest expectations and managing staff numbers to meet seasonal fluctuations in business have dominated Julie's time as manager.

Her legacy to the centre is increasing income year-on-year and attracting significantly more Unitarian visitors. She has introduced well-received initiatives, such as, Wildflower Walks, Quilting and Creative Writing events. Unitarian families have celebrated weddings, anniversaries and birthdays, made memorable and special by Julie's meticulous care and attention to their needs. Through her collaboration with the village, the centre has an Internet café, the village school has a garden on centre land and village events are held in the Charles

Peach room.

This year she has made real her dream of refurbishing one of the Barleycrofts cottages as a holiday let. Her abiding passion has been actively improving the environmentally important centre woodlands and meadows in partnership with Peak Park authorities. In the centre grounds she has worked with gardener, Jack Binks, creating a sensory garden and landscaping other garden areas to give guests quiet corners to sit and contemplate. Lots of small housekeeping improvements have improved guest comfort and individual guests have benefited time and again from Julie's many caring acts of kindness.

One of the privileges of working at the centre for Julie is having regular contact with Unitarian friends. She promises to continue to support the centre. The Management Committee wish Julie well for her future, and express their heartfelt appreciation of her valued contribution to the ongoing work of the Nightingale Centre.

Marion Baker is a member of the Nightingale Centre Management Committee and of the Sheffield congregation.

Letters

(Continued from previous page)

and telephone conferencing work and that more decision-making can be delegated to commissions, panels and GA staff. We need, amongst other things, an open and accessible action plan, evidence-based information and proposals which are followed through. How about it?

Louise Rogers

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Read anti-religion books and make up your own mind

To the Editor:

Through absence, I've only just seen the 12 July issue of *The Inquirer* and Bill Darlison's article 'Make your next million'. He seems to give away something of himself early in the article, when (amongst the books mentioned) he recommends as a model for the project, Hitchens, who '...doesn't feel a need to be objective...and is not afraid to sprinkle

his paragraphs with highly entertaining, if, at times, excessive, put-downs.' A fair description of Bill's own article! I did read Hitchens' book, but found it wanting – precisely because I didn't think it sufficiently objective. Dawkins is in a different category, although it's true he is sometimes scathing about beliefs and the behaviour of religionists. He does, all the same, attempt to deal with his subject rationally. He sees no reason to believe in an all-powerful supernatural being and, consequently, objects to those who claim such a being as a fact and one from whom they have received infallible direction which allows them in turn to direct the lives of others. He acknowledges that he cannot prove there is no God (a negative can't be proved), but argues that probability is strongly against it.

Sharing the beliefs of Dawkins does not mean lacking a sense of wonder and awe at the nature and beauty of the universe (most of which we know about

only through scientific endeavour). Nor does it mean a lack of a sense of the deep fellowship and love for each other, of which humans are capable. It does mean that you don't assign the source of that to a supernatural being. Finally, the suggestion that books against the idea of a supernatural being, and sometimes against organised religion itself, are necessarily written primarily to make millions for the authors, is a cheap way to attack ideas that don't square with your own. Is it sometimes done? Possibly; just as there have been many pro-religion books apparently written for that reason. But that should not give a licence to imply that all these authors have such a motive, and I certainly don't believe Dawkins does. I would suggest that anyone who hasn't read Dawkins book should do so and make up their minds for themselves.

John Tippler

Spalding, Lincs

News in brief

Nominations for election to the GA Executive Committee

The time for those Unitarians who wish to stand in the forthcoming election to the Executive Committee has come. Those who want to put themselves forward should contact Popularis Ltd, 6 De Montfort Mews Leicester LE1 7EU (annehock@popularis.org) who have been charged by the GA with running the election. The nomination period starts on 22 September and closes on 20 October, but applications for nomination papers can be made to Popularis from now.

— *The Electoral Panel: Alan Ruston, Peter Hewis, Andrew Hill*

Unitarians marched with Pride

Once again representatives of the British Unitarian Movement carried the banner in support of Lesbian and Gay rights at the London Pride march on July 5th.

Numbers were small, but represented Essex Hall and congregations in London, East Anglia and the South. In any case, lost amongst everyone else with only the banner showing, who is to know who is and is not Unitarian in a narrow or a broad sense? Certainly those at "Fundagelical Corner" (Regent Street/Pall Mall) probably feared we were legion when handed our flyer affirming "the rights of people to give full emotional and physical expression to their sexuality" and offering them a blessing! Perhaps they took something to Lambeth with them — those that intended going there...

The weather was better than last year. The rain held off, just leaving the wind. And there is something quite special for those

of us who remember the Section 28 years in legitimately taking over Oxford Street, Regent Street, Piccadilly Circus and parts of Trafalgar Square and Whitehall even just for a couple of hours. No time for complacency (remember Lambeth) but we now do have more of a position of strength to build on — thanks to our friends and supporters inside and outside Unitarianism.

— *John Prickett*

Heritage weekend at Hinckley

Jenny Goddard will hold an exhibition of her paintings in the historic surroundings of the Hinckley Unitarian Chapel during the Heritage Weekend of 13-14 September.

Despite having to give up art lessons at school, Jenny never gave up her interest in painting and drawing. So when a significant birthday approached, she went to college and studied GCSE, AS and A level Art, gaining an 'A' grade in each. After college, she held an exhibition in her hometown of Southampton and has since done a series of paintings for a local art-in-offices scheme.

She is a productive painter, using acrylic and watercolours mostly and with a preference for landscape work (so she can combine it with her other favourite pastime, walking). 'I'm very excited by bringing some of the pictures to Hinckley' Jenny said. 'My work tends to be quite colourful and the chapel will be a lovely setting.' The exhibition is free and the chapel is open Saturday, 10am-6pm and Sunday, 2-5pm. A selection of chapel records can also be viewed during Heritage Weekend and light refreshments will be available.

— *Linda Phillips*

Children have a fine time at Hucklow

By Ernest Baker

Many and varied are the ways in which supporters, including the children themselves, raise money for the "Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow" Fund.

Children at a Primary School in Mansfield, set in a bleak estate with few community facilities and no shops, have for the second year running held a fund-raiser, resulting in £151.94. Following the contact initiative of the Rev Derek and Pauline Smith, children from the school have for several years enjoyed holidays at the Nightingale Centre. Their effort included a table-top sale, with books, toys, games and bric-a-brac; a nail bar (!); and a "kick up" competition. All the Year 6 children took part; some of them, Nicola, Paige, Tia, Heidi, Jessica, Katie, Daisy and Shane, who form the school's so-called "Hucklow Committee", wrote a letter accompanying the cheque, thanking us for the holidays.

There's still time this financial year to hold an event — it does rather look as though we shall *not* reach our ambitious target this year of £30,000. Oh, and if anyone wants their old vinyl LPs or Cassette tapes lovingly transferred (complete with all those nostalgia-inducing scratches!) to CD, I am willing to do it for a reasonable donation to SaCH! Pass them on, next time you see me...

At the time of writing, nine of this year's 11 scheduled weeks have taken place, and plans are in hand for 2009. If your congregation has contact with, or is aware of, or even can gather



A group of children on holiday at Hucklow recently enjoyed a walk on Dale Bridge.

(with suitable leaders) an appropriate group of children, not least from south of the Trent (!), who would not otherwise get a holiday, please let one of us know — the Rev Peter Godfrey (Chair), petergodfrey224@btinternet.com; the Rev Ernest Baker (Hon. Secretary), ewsmth@compuserve.com.

Applications will be formally considered at the Annual Trustees Meeting in early November. More information about the fund is available on the website: www.uccn.uk/sacth.htm

The Rev Ernest Baker is a retired Unitarian minister.